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C O N F I D E N T I A L KUWAIT 004460

SIPDIS

STATE FOR NEA/ARPI

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TAGS: PGOV PREL KU PDEM FREEDOM AGENDA NATIONAL ASSEMBLY

SUBJECT: FREEDOM AGENDA: GOK FORMS MINISTERIAL COMMITTEE TO
STUDY REDUCTION OF ELECTORAL DISTRICTS

REF: KUWAIT 4406

Classified By: Ambassador Richard LeBaron for reasons 1.4 (b)

1. (SBU) The GOK has formed a ministerial-level committee to "study" proposals to reduce the number of electoral districts from 25 to 10, or fewer, and to register voters based on their civil identification numbers. The six-person committee is headed by First Deputy Prime Minister and Interior Minister Shaykh Nawaf Al-Ahmed Al-Jaber Al-Sabah. Other members of the committee are: Deputy Prime Minister and State Minister for Cabinet Affairs and State Minister for National Assembly Affairs Mohammed Dhifallah Sharar, Minister of Energy Shaykh Ahmed Al-Fahd Al-Ahmed Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, Minister of Justice and Minister of Public Works Dr. Ahmed Baqer, Minister of Planning and State Minister for Administrative Development Affairs Dr. Ma'souma Al-Mubarak, and Minister of Information Dr. Anas Al-Rasheed. The committee will submit its study to the Council of Ministers "when it is finalized," Kuwait News Agency (KUNA) reported.

2. (C) COMMENT: Most of our contacts believe that electoral reforms will not now be taken up this calendar year, with the reform emphasis now focusing on the revised Press Law, which most believe will be passed. (The GOK will also spend considerable capital getting the huge project for exploring the northern oilfields -- Project Kuwait -- passed.) Formation of a committee is a time-honored way to kill an idea, but the committee contains at least two strong supporters of electoral reform, although they are the most junior: the Planning Minister and the Information Minister. The Energy Minister has not shown his cards publicly but most put him in the against camp, believing that he is quite comfortable with the way the current system allows the powers that be to influence legislators. The other members are likely to be influenced by what they perceive to be Shaykh Sabah's leanings. The last we heard from the PM on this issue, he was putting the ball back in the National Assembly's court -- slow death for reform proposals.

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